E.10.30

A DISCOURSE OF *The Duty of shewing forth a Good Example in our Lives;*

Deliver'd in a

SERMON

AT

St. *Mary le Bow* Church,

March the 28th 1698.

By *WILLIAM WHITFELD*, Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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TO ALL

That are Concern'd in the Societies for Reformation of Manners.

I Will not make any excuſe from the ſuddeneſs of the warning given me to Preach this Sermon; for the Subject requiſite for your Auditory, is ſo Conſtant a Theme of our Pulpits in our own Pariſh Churches, that there are not any of my Brethren, I believe, unprepar'd in a leſs time to give you a Seaſonable Diſcourſe, ſuitable to the Occaſion of your Meeting.

I have taken the Liberty to alter the Wording of ſome very few particulars in my Tranſcribing it for the Preſs, that it may give the ſame ſatisfaction to thoſe of your Number who ſhall Read it, as it ſeem'd to do to ſome that heard it Preach'd: to the end that it may have its due Effect upon all thoſe that are Sincere and Well-minded in this Undertaking, for their inſtruction; as it will moſt certainly have upon them that are not, for their Condemnation.

Matt.

Matt. V. 16.

Let your Light ſo ſhine before Men that they may ſee your Good Works, and Glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

THeſe Words are part of our Bleſſed Saviour's Sermon upon the Mount, and the Doctrine deliver'd in them concerns all Chriſtians; for as *Grotius* obſerves, it is a *multitude* of Diſciples, to whom Chriſt here Preaches; not only the twelve, or the ſeventy, but to Diſciples of all Conditions, Ages and Sexes. 'Tis likewiſe all Chriſtians in general, who are exhorted by St. *Paul*, to *Shine as Lights in the World, amidſt a Crooked and Perverſe Nation.* Phil. 2. 15.

We may underſtand from hence, how far theſe Words of my Text are ſuitable to the preſent occaſion of our Meeting. They are addreſs'd to an *undiſtinguiſh'd* Aſſembly of Hearers, (the Repreſentatives of the whole Body of Chriſtians;) the force of them therefore reaches to ev'ry individual Member of theſe Societies, whatſoever their Characters and Employments are. The Subject of them, is to teach all thoſe that are Diſciples of Chriſt, what their Converſation ought to be in this World; that in order to propagate the Faith, and Eſtabliſh the Precepts of the Goſpel, they muſt make themſelves the *Light of the World, and the Salt of the Earth:* which Doctrine is moſt pro-

per for their Inſtruction, who have engag'd themſelves in a work of Reformation of Manners, for the promoting Virtue, Piety, and true Religion.

Now to be *the Light of the World, and the Salt of the Earth*, may be underſtood of having ſomething analogous to their good and uſeful properties of Enlightning and Seas'ning; the Excellency of which Qualities conſiſts in ſpending themſelves, not for their *own*, but the great Benefit of *others*: intimating that no Diſciple of Chriſt is born for himſelf alone. 'Tis required by his Maſter, that his Life ſhould be a publick and communicable Good, and himſelf that thing, of all others, which is moſt eminently viſible, moſt uſeful and diffuſive of its Vertue; conſpicuous, as the high ſituation renders the City built upon an Hill; and beneficial, as *Light* and *Salt* are in their uſefulneſs to Mankind.

Each of theſe ſimilitudes is a true and lively pattern of a Chriſtians Converſation in this World, and ſignifies ſomething more than our being meerly harmleſs, retir'd, and inoffenſive in our Lives; for ſo is the Candle that *is put under the Buſhel*, and the *Salt* that *hath loſt its Savour*: But then *the Salt is good for nothing, but to be caſt out and troden under Foot of Men*, having loſt its Virtue of Seaſoning, and Preſerving from Corruption; and *the Light is hid, which is not ſet on a Candleſtick, that it may give Light to all that are in the Houſe*; it is uſeleſs, when it doth not ſo *ſhine before Men, that they may ſee our Good Works, and Glorify our Father which is in Heaven.* In which Precept I will only obſerve in ſhort ſome few things that have been the Subject of another Diſcourſe, about the manner of our *Light Shining*, and ſo paſs on to the Subſtance of what I intend at preſent to ſpeak to.

1. Our

1. *Our Light is to Shine before Men. Men*, who cannot know the ſecrets of the Heart, and intention of the Mind. This *Light* therefore, is to conſiſt in Things done *outwardly*, which they can ſee and know.

2. Our *Light* is to *Shine* in *Works*, which may be ſeen, and will remain; and not in *Words*, which are to be heard only, and vaniſh.

3. This is to be done for the *Glory* of God, and not for our own *Vain-Glory*.

Each of theſe Particulars do immediately reſpect you Brethren, who are of theſe Societies; wherein I may preſume that you are ſo well inclin'd of yourſelves, and have been ſo Faithfully inſtructed by others, who have gone more worthily before me in this Exerciſe, that I ſhall not ſpend any time in enforcing them, but paſs by theſe Circumſtances to ſpeak of the Duty it ſelf: which I take to be a ſtrict obligation upon ev'ry Chriſtian, to lead a Life exemplary and ſhining in the ways of Vertue, true Piety, and all manner of Goodneſs.

And I look upon this to come home to the preſent Buſineſs of the Day, and more nearly to concern you that are of theſe Societies. It is a great Undertaking in which you have voluntarily embark'd; the Suppreſſing of Vice, and ſetting your ſelves as a Bulwark againſt an inundation of Prophaneneſs and Atheiſm, which threatens deſtruction to theſe Kingdoms. But you ought to conſider, Brethren, with the Wiſe King going to War, whether with your 10000 you are able to meet your Enemy that cometh againſt you with 20000. for many are the Wild Beaſts with which you are to fight; many the bold and hardned Vices which you are to encounter: you

muſt expect to meet with great Reſiſtance in this Enterprize, and to be preſs'd with all the Storms of Envy and Malice, which the Stratagems of the Devil, or the Impetuous Luſts of Wicked Men, can raiſe againſt you.

Give me leave therefore to recommend unto you one Piece of neceſſary Armour in your Warfare; (neceſſary, both to your own Defence, and to the Overthrow of your Enemies,) which is your own good Example going before you, in all thoſe Vertues you would encourage, and in refraining wholly from thoſe Vices, which (by the Bleſſing of God,) you may be happily inſtrumental in ſubduing.

I do not recommend this as if I fear'd your want of it, or ſuſpected your Care of carrying it always about with you; but I would fain endeavour to ſhew you the Force of this ſingle Weapon, and its Power (far greater than any that is coercive and compulſory) to reform the Manners of this licentious Age: I would convince you of the wonderful Influence of a good and vertuous Example, and of how great Account it is, in directing the Actions of Life aright. For ſuch is our Perverſeneſs and Peeviſhneſs, that we are Obſtinate againſt all Force, though it be us'd to keep us from Deſtruction! Such is our Blindneſs and Pride, that Precepts are either obſcure to us, or elſe we deaf to them, though they admoniſh us of our Eternal Welfare! But now, a good Example, calls to the Eyes of the Learner, and ſets forth Virtue in a viſible ſhape before him; it inſinuates it ſelf where force is denyed an entrance, and becomes more beneficial and inſtructive than Precept; as our going along with the Traveller, and Accompanying him in his Road, is a ſafer and kinder direction

direction, than giving him Rules to find out his way alone, our ſelves taking a contrary Road, when we profeſs at the *ſame* time, to be going the *ſame* Journey.

Wherefore, *let your Light ſo ſhine before Men, that they may ſee your Good Works, and Glorify your Father which is in Heaven.*

From which Words, I ſhall in my following Diſcourſe, endeavour to ſhew you theſe three Things.

I. The great Prevalency of Example in General.

II. That it behoves all Chriſtians to be very careful that they ſhew forth themſelves examples of Good, that is of Vertue and Piety, both in their publick and in their private Capacities.

III. That it is their Duty likewiſe to reſtrain all vicious and bad Examples in other Men, to the utmoſt of their Power.

I. To ſhew the great Prevalency of Example in General.

There is naturally a ſtrong influence ariſing from the Example of a Superiour or Companion in whatever we ſee them do; for all Men have the ſame Affections planted within them, and it is not to be expected, but that the ſame Objects ſhould move them, and that which hath rais'd a Paſſion in one Man's Soul, ſhould ſtrike upon the ſame ſtring in another's. Thus another Man's Sorrow naturally excites Trouble in the Beholder, from whence proceeds Compaſſion: A Friends Joy warms our Heart with Chearfulneſs, and encourageth Mirth: Whatever we ſee done, to which (either from Nature,

or

or from the Corruptneſs of it) we have any Propenſity, there is ſo near an alliance in Humanity, that it calls upon the ſame affection in our Souls, to bear it company and ſympathize with it. In this manner doth the force of Example work upon us, by having power from any external Objects, to move our outward ſenſes and ſtrength from thence, to wind up our Paſſions.

Indeed it prevails moſt over us, when we make the leaſt uſe and application of our Reaſon; and accordingly there is one part of our Life, (not inconſiderable, if compar'd with the ſpan-length of our Days, but of great moment as it is the Foundation of the whole Structure) that is capable of knowing nothing but from Imitation. Beſides in our Infancy moſt documents are inſtill'd into us this way, and the firſt dawning of our Reaſon ſhews it ſelf by a ready aptneſs in acting thoſe things over, which we ſee others do before us. Theſe rudiments are ſure to take place in the Child, and to grow up in the young Man; from hence the one is taught to Speak, and the other learns in time to Sin: And though the Lines which Nature draws in him may be ſometimes found weak, and unreſembling his Father, yet the Impreſſions from an ill Example are commonly ſtrong, and laſting, and always ſhew the Parent in the likeneſs of his Vices.

From this firſt Seas'ning, we receive the Tincture of our whole Lives, and are never afterwards wholly freed from the ſervitude of Cuſtom and Imitation. Theſe alone are the Maſters of our tender Years, and the great Inſtructers of our Youth. having once taken Poſſeſſion, they Inſinuate themſelves by gentle and eaſy ſteps, and their Precepts ſink inſenſibly

inſenſibly into our Souls; unleſs it be where our own Corrupted Nature joyns forces with them, and there they carry us irreſiſtibly, and throw us headlong down the precipice. When our Ears have been much us'd to any kind of Imperfection of Speech, our Tongues by degrees will frame themſelves into the ſame way of Utterance, and from Stammering Lips learn to Stammer. But let ſuch Vices ſtand before us, wherein 'tis hard to reſiſt, and we prone and obedient to meet them half way with delight, how rapid then is the ſtream in which we are carried? how impoſſible is it, that *we ſhould carry Fire in our Boſom, and our Cloaths not be Burnt?* Or touch pitch and be undefil'd?

Even ſo impoſſible is it that the pernicious Example of any Vice ſhould not leave ſome footſteps of its Acquaintance, wherever it hath had an intimate Converſation: and (to ſhew its great Dominion) it doth not fail uſually to lead us captive even in thoſe things where there is no allurement or temptation from pleaſure, and much leſs no inducement from Reaſon; for the doing of which, no other plea can be aſſign'd, but that we blindly give ourſelves up to Imitation, and Naturally turn mimicks. Nevertheleſs to *this* cauſe, the propagation of many grievous Sins amongſt us may be *juſtly* Attributed, which I am confident would never find a place in the Catalogue of our *growing Tranſgreſſions*, but that others are ſeen to commit them.

To inſtance in one, too Common and much encreaſing amongſt us. No other reaſon I ſuppoſe, can be given for the prophane and Cuſtomary Sin of Swearing, and for thoſe execrable Oaths and Curſes, (the Vomit) which even Children lick up. Whatever Blaſpheming Fiend was the firſt Author of them, 'tis I be-

I believe demonſtrable, that Imitation only keeps them now alive amongſt us Men.

For it is plain, that neither Reaſon nor Pleaſure goes along with any of them: there is no delight that I ever heard of, in the pronunciation of an Oath; nor are there any of thoſe Men I believe, who have habituated their Mouths to theſe Cuſtomary Prophaneſſes, that either mean or ſpeak any thing by them. For let us Conſider any of theſe Oaths or Curſes as *Words*, and *parts of Humane* Speech; and we ſhall find that *Words*, were firſt of all taught Mankind to an uſeful purpoſe, and far different End. They were inſtituted to repreſent Things in diſcourſe, and to ſtand in the place of thoſe Objects, which we cannot bring into ſight ſo often as we have occaſion to talk of them. But what Object in the Creation doth an Oath or Curſe ſtand for? What Being, doth an haſty Adjuration of the Name of the Almighty, imprint an Idea of in his Mind who hears it? Surely it cannot give him any Repreſentation of *God*, if he conſiders his awful Majeſty and Honour, and at the ſame time, the Mockery and Contempt to which his Holy Name is expos'd. What particular conception then, doth it convey of *his* Mind who ſpeaks by theſe Oaths and Curſes? No image ſurely of *his* Reaſon, who dares to make ſport with that *Great* Name, by which alone he muſt either be Happy or Miſerable to all Eternity. It may perhaps be ſaid that it is to expreſs the fury of his Paſſion, that He vents himſelf in theſe Blaſphemies of Hell; but how ſtrange would this Language appear to ſober Men and Serious Chriſtians, if Cuſtom had not made it too Familiar to our Ears!

In like manner may be ſhown the Dominion of Example

Example over Men's Minds, and Actions, and our ſlaviſh imitation in many Sins of another Nature; for there is nothing ſo Abſurd or Wicked to which we may not be led by it. Indeed it chiefly takes the Rein when our Reaſon ſits the looſeſt, and therefore governs us more eſpecially in our follies and irregularities; but if we conſider well, we ſhall find that it is not without Power of giving Laws to the ſerious and better part of our Life, in which therefore the Prevalency of a good Example, may be of an ineſtimable Benefit. But yet, ſuch is our Natural Propenſity to Sin, and ſo much more of Evil than of Good, doth this mirror repreſent unto us in this World, that I much fear the diſadvantages of a bad Example, muſt be allowed to weigh down the Scale.

God hath been pleas'd indeed in all Ages of his Church, to raiſe up Perſons of an excellent Spirit, in times of the moſt general Corruption: Men, who not being carried away with the ſtream of popular Vices, make the right uſe of the Faculties they are indu'd with by Heaven, in thinking, reaſoning, and acting for themſelves in Juſtice and Integrity; not guided by the Influence of other Men's Example, but by the Dictates of Reaſon, and Precepts of Religion. Such Perſons will always diſtinguiſh themſelves from a crowd of ill-doers, and may by the Bleſſing of God, become the good Genius of the Age they live in. But alaſs! in proportion to the great Herd, theſe leaders in Vertue are but very few; and generally ſpeaking, *the Chains of this ſervile Folly of Imitation in ill things, Fetter down the moſt of Mankind to Corrupt Manners, and an Irreligious Life.*

II. And now, if the Example of others be thus prevailing, it concerns all Chriſtians to be careful

that their *Light ſhine before Men*, and that they ſet forth themſelves Examples of Good, both in their publick and in their private Capacities. Which is my ſecond particular.

The Example of a Good Life is ſo far influential, as it can be ſeen, known, or read of; for ſo *Light* directs the Eye as far, as ever the Eye poſſibly can follow it. And the Lives of the Apoſtles and other Holy Men, ceaſe not at this day to call upon us to imitate them.

And herein the Duty of ev'ry Chriſtian may be conſidered twofold.

1. A *general* Duty to lead a good Life, to the End that all Men may be benefited and no one ſcandaliz'd by the Example; an obligation to walk with Sincerity and Uprightneſs in the view of all Men alike: for being our Saviour hath Commanded his Diſciples to be the Light of the World, the whole World hath an undoubted claim to the benefit of their Light.

2. A *Particular* Duty, to which ev'ry Chriſtian is bound from the ſeveral Relations he bears to others in this Life, either in his *private* Capacity, or from any publick Character; that is, in any ſtation whatever, wherein he is immediately appointed by Almighty God to be exemplary to thoſe under his care, or where, of themſelves, any ſhall be prone to Copy after his Actions.

Thus whoſoever ſhall commit any Wickedneſs, whereby others are in danger of being corrupted, Tranſgreſſeth this general Duty; but with regard to ſuch who ſtand more nearly related to him, he violates his particular Duty. For as a *Parent*, the Authority of his vicious Example is more immediately deſtructive to his *Tender Children*; as a *Maſter of a Fa-*

a Family, it eaſily Commands the *obſequious Servants*. If he ſhall be the *Supreme Magiſtrate*, his Example is in the higheſt degree fatal to *his Subjects*; If a *Miniſter of the Goſpel* ſets himſelf an Example in any Sin, He is no long the Shepherd of his Flock, but the Peſt and Rotteneſs of it.

This ſhews the Reaſon of our Obligation to *both* the *parts* of this Duty, and why we are to ſet forth ourſelves Examples for Good in our *private* capacities and moſt retir'd converſation, as well as in *publick* view. As *Chriſtians*, we are to enlighten all Mankind; but theſe, and ſeveral other (whether Domeſtick or Publick) Characters, do much enhaunce the obligation, in reſpect of thoſe to whom we ſtand thus related: for conſider'd only as *Chriſtians*, this Duty lies upon us in Common with all our Fellow-Chriſtians; but now from *theſe Relations* added to that Conſideration, a good Example is ev'ry particular Man's particular Duty, and the performance of it belongs to no one but himſelf alone. No one in the World bears properly a ſhare with the Parent in the Duty and obligations of a Parent; no Man can ſupply the Example of the Magiſtrate, but the Magiſtrate; nor any, the care of the Maſter of the Family, but the Maſter himſelf.

And under ſome one or other of theſe like Conſiderations, there is no Perſon, but muſt acknowledge it his Duty to be pious, vertuous and exemplary in his Life: for his Condition can never be ſo obſcure, nor his Converſation private, but that He may be a ſhining Light in it: nor can his Example ever become ſo profligate and contemptible, but that there will be thoſe, who may be led aſtray by it. If his Character is not large enough to fill a Country, or

to be look'd upon by the whole City, yet to that Houſe he lives in, he may give a good and wholeſome Example; where-ever the pious Chriſtian converſes, he is in a capacity of enlightning by his Reproofs and Advice; and his Children, Servants and Companions, will by the Grace of God, become the better for thoſe Leſſons in Vertue, and Patterns of Goodneſs which he ſhall ſet them.

So on the contrary, though thy vicious Habits ſhall have made thee the Scorn of Mankind, in ſo much that the ſhame which encircles thee, keeps all *Wiſe* Men at a diſtance; yet Children and Fools are in danger, and thy conſtant Companions in Sin will ſtill be deprav'd, and every day grow worſe by thy Vices. In ſhort, it is hardly poſſible but that the Example of an holy Life, (however private and mean it be), muſt do ſome Good; and I'm ſure it is utterly impoſſible, but that a vicious Example, though it be to the laſt Degree contemptible, muſt do hurt to Mankind.

But then, the more eminent the ſtation is, the farther will the Example be ſeen, and the wider will its Influence ſpread: if Good, ſo much the more Good it does; if Evil, ſo much the more Hurt; for *the City that is ſet on an Hill cannot be hid.* And ſuch have you made yourſelves Bretheren, by placing yourſelves in this Station of overlooking other Man's Lives and of reforming their Manners.

Here indeed is the proper Sphere for Vertue, Piety and Goodneſs to ſhine brightly in; but on the other hand, there is no ſoil more Fruitful for Sin: for that ſeed falls into good Ground, which brings forth Fruit, ſome an hundred, ſome ſixty, and ſome thirty fold; and ſuch may the Produce of Vice be calculated from any one of your Examples; it hardens thoſe you would reform;

form; and betrays the innocent, who think themſelves ſecure by treading in your ſteps. Such is the return of Vice from a Parent's or a Maſter of a Family's Example; it ſprings up with this entreaſe in his Children and Servants, and like ſome Hereditary or Peſtilential Diſtemper, runs in the Blood and through the Family. Such is its multiplication whenever it is ſown in the Supreme Magiſtrate, or in any Perſon in an high-place; from whence the *Great-Man* ſhowers down his Vices upon all that are around him, the Nation is overſpread with his Prophaneneſs, and his Uncleanneſs as with Waters, and his Sin runs down like a mighty Stream. It is no longer a *ſingle* Vice when it is in poſſeſſion of theſe ſtrong holds, the name of it is *Legion*, for they are many: even as many as it hath propagated in many others, and each of them goes ſtill on to multiply in their Followers; 'tis as many as its Imitations are. And if there are degrees of Torments in another World, proportionable to the Aggravations of Guilt, a Sin thus complicated will meet with as great a Puniſhment, and we ſhall ſuffer under the Torments of thoſe Men's Damnation, which by our Example we have farthered, as well as under the weight of our own.

The reaſon therefore is twofold for our Obligation to this duty of ſetting forth ourſelves a good Example. Firſt, becauſe we are anſwerable for all the pernicious conſequences of our Vices Corrupting other Men. And ſecondly, becauſe our good Example may by the Bleſſing of God, become an inducement to others, to walk in the Paths of Vertue and Holineſs, who by ſeeing our Good Works, may Glorify our Father which is in Heaven, by tranſcribing after theſe Actions of Vertue, Piety, and Goodneſs, wherein God is chiefly Glorifyed by his Creatures. But

But we muſt take great heed, Brethren, that it is not the effect of a Phariſaical Righteouſneſs, or of Pride and Oſtentation, which raiſes this Spirit in us; but a Principle of true Piety, and an humble Deſire of doing real Good. For the *one* of theſe, is the Religion of the Hypocrite, and aims at nothing more than to be ſeen; but the other is the Piety of the hearty Chriſtian, and the only end is to ſerve God, and benefit Mankind. The one, indeed, may poſſibly break out frequently into ſudden guſts and flaſhes, and into violent and uneven heats of Holyneſs; but it will end like the crackling of Thornes under the Pot, conſuming it ſelf in a blaze and noiſe, the ſure ſigns of the weakneſs and ſhort continuance of the flame. But your duty, Brethren, is to ſhew forth a Prudent and Uniform Zeal, and a well-weigh'd Reſolution in the ways of Vertue and Piety: 'tis to be an eveneſs of Temper, and ſedateneſs of Mind, ariſing from firmneſs and conſtancy in the Soul.

This will make *your Light Shine always before Men, Burning* conſtantly, but never *Blazing*, and will be the *Lamp* which ſhall never want its *Oyl*.

III. It is likewiſe every Chriſtians Duty to reſtrain all Vicious and bad Examples in other Men, as far as he can.

We cannot hope *wholly* to extirpate Sin in ourſelves; and much leſs can we propoſe to root out all Vice and Prophaneneſs from the Land: But yet we may endeavour to break their Force, and by the Bleſſing of God hinder their Increaſe; and if we unite ourſelves ſtrongly to keep them under, and reſolutely engage ourſelves never to ſuffer them to appear but in their own proper colours of Shame and Confuſion, we ſhall in time tread upon their Necks. And

And this is our Duty under all the ſame Obligations, and in all the ſame Stations of Life, both private and publick, from the ſelf ſame Conſiderations, and fully in every circumſtance our Duty, as much as my laſt particular was. The end of *that*, was to ſhew forth the Example of a Blameleſs and Vertuous Converſation, for the publick Benefit of Mankind, and for the private Good of our Friends; and ſuch is the tendency of *this* Duty: *that* was for the maintenance and improvement of Holyneſs, and for the Honour and Glory of God; and *this* is for the reſcuing of oppreſs'd Vertue, and for the diſcouragement of Prophaneneſs and Atheiſm. And though we cannot expect (as I have ſaid) to make all Men ſincere Believers, and true converts to Vertue; (for neither had the Holy Example, the Divine Precepts, nor the Severe Rebukes of our Bleſſed Saviour ſuch an Effect:) nevertheleſs, we may endeavour (and I truſt with ſome good ſucceſs) to brow-beat the Vicious and Prophane, that by our over-civil and ſervile Compliance with them in their Impieties, they may not bear themſelves as Conquerours over Religion and Vertue: we may blaſt the Reputation which Vice would get by a Good-Man's ſmiling upon it; and we may do our parts in hindring its ſpreading into a Faſhion, under our Protection and Connivence.

And ſince we have the Laws of God and Man on our ſide in fighting in this Cauſe of true Vertue and Piety, it is neceſſary that we ſhould exert this Power, and make the right uſe of our ſeveral Talents; that Drunkenneſs, Prophaneneſs, and Uncleanneſs, (and all the bold Off-ſpring of open Wickedneſs) may be kept under this Curb *at leaſt*, of being diſcountenanc'd and puniſh'd, as far as Authority ſhall be put into

our

our hands to that purpoſe. We may lawfully joyn our endeavours to confine theſe Works of Iniquity to their Native Darkneſs, and not ſuffer them to become Companions of Noon-day. For why ſhould it be permitted in a Chriſtian Community, to Wicked-Men to appear bare-fac'd and braving in their Shame? Daring in their defyance of God? Recounting their Victories, and boaſting of their Trophies in all manner of Vice? Any Sin that ſhall get the aſcendant thus far in a Nation, becomes a Triumph of the People, and is a ſure ſign that the majority or governing part, are themſelves deeply touch'd with the ſame Diſeaſe; (whether it be Prophaneneſs, that they are Prophane; or Uncleanneſs, that they are Unclean; or Corruption, that they are Corrupt;) as ſurely, as if Men ſhould walk the Streets with their Plague-ſores freſh upon them, no one would doubt, but that the Infection was general, and that the Sick of that place, out-number'd the Sound.

And it concerns us not only as Chriſtians, but as Lovers of our Country, and as Friends to Ourſelves and Poſterity, to be Hearty and Zealous in theſe Endeavours: for we may aſſure ourſelves that every Sin becomes a National Crime, whenever it ſhall be accompanied with theſe Aggravations: the Guilt is only *private* when it is committed in a Corner and ſecretly; but the *publick* is to be accountable unto God, when by their Impunity and Encouragement they ſhall make the Sin their own: For then it begins to call loudly to Heaven for Puniſhment, and the Cry enters into the Ears of the Almighty. *Lord! how long wilt thou look on? How long Lord? forever? Ariſe, O God, in thy Righteouſneſs, and make bare thy Arm to Judgment! Behold the Children of Men are all*

all Backſliders; They encourage themſelves in their own Wickedneſs, and ſay Tuſh! God ſhall not ſee. But ariſe O Lord in thy Fury, and ſcatter them in thine indignation, for there is none that dealeth righteouſly, and Loveth Judgment; No, there is not one Godly Man left.

This is the Cry of a publick National Guilt; that is, of unpuniſh'd, ſpreading and triumphing Vice and Atheiſm. The Juſtice of God requires that the community ſhould ſuffer, and the Puniſhment become as general as the Offence. His Wiſdom, Equity and Providence are then at ſtake, and *muſt* be made good, by a Viſible and Publick Execution of Juſtice; which comes down upon a Nation in Famines or Peſtilences, in the Sword, in Earth-quakes, and in other great deſolations, which are the uſual Judgments of Heaven, and Terrible Vials of God's Wrath, pour'd out upon a Sinful Land and polluted People.

And let us not deceive our ſelves! there are Family Sins as well as National, and the ſame Rule holds with proportion, in every private Houſhold and leſſer Company of Evil-Doers: but the more populous the Society is, the greater is the danger in permitting the Trangreſſions of the People to be ſeen in the Gates of the City, and to walk our ſtreets publickly; for there is as certain a Contagion in ſome ſorts of Sins, (which Men catch by looking on,) as there is in ſome diſeaſes. *Theſe* therefore are to be *ſuppreſs'd*, if they cannot be *wholly extinguiſh'd*; that they may be like thoſe ſubterranean Fires which burn ſlow, and prey only upon their own Fewel, whileſt pent within the Bowels of the Earth, but when they once take air, break out into a Flame, laying all things before them in Ruine.

And there is no great difficulty, if we knew but our own ſtrength, to keep any Sin thus far at leaſt, under our Feet; for there is a Natural ſhame which attends every diſhoneſt Action: Vice is conſcious of its own deformity and loathſomneſs, and by inſtinct requires darkneſs and a Vizor: but it may be flatter'd by great Examples into a good Opinion of its own Excellencies; it may be Cheriſh'd by Complaiſance and and harden'd by Familarity into ſuch an Impudence, as to appear before the Sun and without its Mask. However ſince God and Nature have ſtamp'd ſhame upon every Vice, Let us know our own Right and Dominion over it, and keep it within its Natural bounds of ſhame! Let every honeſt and Vertuous Man ſet his Face directly and boldly againſt Atheiſm, Prophaneneſs, and Immorality! aſſuring himſelf that there is no Sin ſo daring and hardy, which a Man reſolutely-good and pious may not daſh out of Countenance and ſtrike into Confuſion.

I need not tell you Brethren that it is Lawful for you to do this, and that it is Juſt to uſe all the power which the Laws have veſted in you, to reſtrain all ſuch Immoralities, for I hope I have prov'd it to be your Duty: and believe me, it behooves us all to conſider *ſeriouſly*, the ſeveral opportunities and advantages God hath put into our hands, to diſcourage and prohibit Atheiſm, Prophaneneſs and Debauchery, and faithfully to diſcharge our Duty herein; for this likewiſe is one way of making *other* Men's Vices *our own*, when they thrive and propagate by our connivence; for be we well aſſur'd, that whoſoever hath it in his Power, to forbid and hinder a Sin, and doth not when he can, he invites and commands it.

And

And thus I have ſhew'd you how Powerful and Influential example is in moſt things we do; how effectually that teaches, and how addicted we are to learn; and that therefore it doth concern us all very much to ſet forth ourſelves Examples of Vertue and Holyneſs, and that of conſequence it is our Duty to reſtrain all Examples of Vice and Wickedneſs in other Men to the utmoſt of our Power. When you ſhall do this, Brethren, ye are then what our Bleſſed Saviour requires his Diſciples to be, *the Light of the World which Shines before Men, and the Salt of the Earth which hath not loſt its Savour.*

I will conclude with ſome ſerious Conſiderations upon the whole.

1. We muſt not expect from what hath been ſaid, that the ill Example of other Men ſhould excuſe the *Followers*, though it will moſt certainly condemn the *Authors* of it. The truth is, we readily catch at the leaſt Shadow of excuſe for Sinning, and ſo lay hold upon this Pretence. *The Woman, ſays* Adam, *whom thou gaveſt me, gave one of the Tree, and I did Eat.* But yet, neither the Woman's Temptation exempted *Adam* from the Puniſhment, nor the Serpent's Temptation the Woman. And as long as we have a Judgment rightly inform'd to diſcern between Good and Evil, and are conſtantly inſtructed from the Word of God, what are the Bounds of the one, and of the other, what we are to do, and what to avoid; other Men's deviations can be no real excuſe for our Tranſgreſſing. When the Precepts of the Goſpel have chalk'd me out the Paths of Vertue and Holyneſs which I am to walk in, it is my own fault, and the proneneſs of my own Vicious Inclinations, if I follow him that ſhews me other ways. By this,

God hath given me ſufficient Light to ſecure me againſt errour, and if I am miſlead, I ſeduce my ſelf. All Men would commiſerate the ſad fate of a *Blind-Man*, to be led by others unknowingly to the edge of a Precipice, and to break himſelf in pieces by his fall from thence; but they will condemn it for *Self-Murder* in one that is *not Blind*. Remember therefore young Men, that whoſoever hath Eyes, leads himſelf to his own Ruine, even when he follows another that tempts him to it.

2. If we are convinc'd of the certainty of a future State, and of the Rewards and Puniſhments after Death; no Argument can be more forcible againſt our Tempting others to Wickedneſs, than this Conſideration, that by the ſame act we encreaſe our own Guilt, and mightily further our Brothers Damnation; *knowing the Judgment of God, that they which commit theſe things are worthy of Death, and yet not only do the ſame, but have Pleaſure in them that do them.*

Thoſe, indeed, who have gone ſo far beyond the Bounds of Shame, know no meaſure: 'tis the leſs wonder therefore, that *their own*, and *other mens* Sins become their triumph and ſport; that they magnify themſelves upon their Victories in the lifts of ſome beaſtly Vice, and make it their mirth to have been ſucceſsful in tempting others; in having *compaſs'd Sea and Land to gain one Proſelyte, whom they make many-fold more the Child of Hell than themſelves.* But the commonneſs of this Sin cannot excuſe it. When ſeriouſly conſider'd, it is but a melancholy ſubject for Mirth, and a moſt ſhameful one to boaſt of. For it is not the part of an *honeſt* Man to take the advantage of his Brothers *Weakneſs*, and enſnare him into Sin; nor of a *Modeſt* Man to *Glory* in his *Shame*;

Shame; and it ſhould be the pleaſure only of the *Devil* to ſeduce the Innocent.

Wherefore, let theſe proſtitute Wretches reſerve their boaſting to the proper time; when *of it ſelf*, every Sin ſhall claim its *right Father*, and each particular Vice, of *its own accord*, diſcover the enticer to it: then it will appear how much more innocent Satan himſelf is, than this tempter of his Brother to Wickedneſs; when other Mens Conſciences ſhall accuſe, and other Mens Sins call for Judgment againſt him; amidſt the ſad Lamentations of many crying about him: "I owe more of my Sins unto "thee, O my Companion, who temptedſt me; and "to thee, my Friend, who didſt ſet me thy Ex-"ample for my Vices, than I do to the worſt ſug-"geſtions and ſtrongeſt Temptations of the Devil. "Thou art He, to whom I owe my Damnation?

3. Let us conſider the Advantages and great Comforts of a Vertuous and Pious Converſation. There can be no Good more truly beneficial, or of greater extent; for it is ſo diffuſive, that all Men may partake of its Influence, without ever leſſening the ſtore: It diminiſhes nothing from the *Sun*, that by it all Men are enlightned, and all Creatures cheriſh'd; nor from *Vertue*, that others are made better by partaking of it.

And this Good proceeds from the Good Example of an Holy Life; a conſtant and exemplary Devotion in the Worſhip of God, may by his Bleſſing contribute to an awful Reverence in the whole Congregation, and recommend our Holy Religion to thoſe, to whom our Indevotion renders it now contemptible. A Life of *Exemplary Piety*, is a ſtanding Rebuke to the Prophane, and a conſtant Curb upon the

the bold Atheiſt. An *Exemplary Vertue*, will either convert the Sinner, or ſhame him at leaſt into an *outward* compliance of Holineſs; and will ſecure the *Innocent*, if it cannot reclaim the *Wicked*.

In ſhort, a good Example is of that general prevalency and Influence, that it calls to all that ſee it, and invites them in the words of the Apoſtle; Come, *Be ye Followers of me, as I am of Chriſt*. And when we ſhall be call'd at the laſt Day to give up our Account of all that hath been intruſted to us in this Life, we may do it with unſpeakable joy, in the words of our Bleſſed Saviour. *Thoſe that thou gaveſt me Holy Father, I have kept, and none of them is loſt, but the Son of Perdition.* Thoſe Servants which thou gaveſt me; Thoſe Children thou haſt bleſſed me with; Thoſe Friends thou haſt made me happy in; Not one of them is loſt through want of my endeavours to reclaim them; None of them hath my Example led aſtray, or my Converſation Corrupted; None of them hath my Connivence encourag'd, or my Temptations ſeduc'd into Sin; Not one of them, Holy Father, but by my goings, I have endeavour'd to keep Upright.

This is the comfort which ariſes here from our doing this Good, and which will meet us hereafter in receiving the Reward. *For they that turn many to Righteouſneſs ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the Firmament, and as the Stars of Heaven for ever and ever. And they ſhall Cauſe Joy in Heaven over every Sinner that Repenteth.*

Laſtly to Conclude by applying my ſelf more particularly, to you Brethren, who are Members of theſe Societies for the Reformation of Manners. I have Choſen this ſubject, of the Neceſſity and Efficacy

ficacy of a vertuous and pious Example in your Converſation, as the moſt ſucceſsful means for your carrying on this good Work. And God grant, that I my ſelf may be endued with a ſufficient portion of his Grace, to follow thoſe precepts which I have now deliver'd to you!

Herein alone will you lay a ſure foundation for that ſtructure which you are deſigning: This (with the Bleſſing of God) is to be the Corner-Stone of that Vertue, Piety, and true Religion, which you are endeavouring to rear up in theſe Nations. *Without* it you build on the Sand; every Tempeſt will ſhake, and at laſt throw it down; and great will be the Fall thereof, to the Triumph of your Adverſaries, and diſcouragement of your Friends.

I have not time left to give you Rules for that Moderation, Integrity and Charity which are neceſſary qualifications for all ſuch as are Sincere in this Undertaking. But I muſt crave your Leave and Patience, whileſt I mention one Blot, with which all ſuch kind of endeavours for Reformationof Manners, (juſtly or unjuſtly) will not fail to beCharg'd by all that areEnemies to it; from which all its good purpoſes have been too Commonly blaſted; and that is Hypocriſy, and Sinfulneſs in yourſelves.

Some of you I ſee are Young Men, and of an Age, moſt liable to thoſe Temptations which you are to encounter with in others; and 'tis not impoſſible, that yourſelves may take the Infection from your applications to cure the Diſeaſe.

But then conſider what the Apoſtle ſaith, *Rom.* 2. 20. *Thou that ſayſt a Man ſhould not commit Adultery, doſt thou commit Adultery! Thou that abhorreſt Idols, doſt thou commit Sacrilege! through you,* (ſays the Apoſtle)

poſtle) *is the Name of God Blaſphemed among the* Gentiles. Not only through them who are *openly* Prophane and Vicious, but through you *chiefly*, who having profeſſedly ſet yourſelves to reform theſe Vices, are guilty of the ſame Wickedneſs. *But I ſay unto you, it ſhall be more tolerable for the Land of* Sodom *in the day of Judgment than for you: the* Publicans *and* Harlots *ſhall go into the Kingdom of God before you; for theſe Sinners Chriſt came to call to Repentance; but the Hope of the Hypocrite ſhall periſh.*

My Charity would oblige me to hope, that there are few or none of your number, Brethren, upon whom this can be juſtly charg'd, but that experience ſhews us, many will be bad in all Societies of Men whatſoever. I muſt therefore here ſolemnly adjure you, let not that *Uzza* put forth his hand to hold the Ark: For in ſuch hands Reformation of Manners becomes the greateſt Scorn, and the moſt prevailing encouragement to Vice.

And not to flatter you, the beſt of Men will find this but a difficult and invidious Work; for they muſt expect that their own Infirmities ſhould be narrowly pried into, and all their Failures expos'd nakedly to the World. It becomes him therefore to be truly a Good Man himſelf, whoever ſhall undertake this Office of Reforming and Correcting others: For 'tis Envy, or the love of Gain perhaps, or the deſire of ſeeming more Holy than your Brethren, but not the love of God and ſervice of Vertue which engages you in this Cauſe, if you indulge yourſelves in the ſame Sins which you condemn and puniſh in other Men. We muſt therefore be ſure *to caſt the Beam out of our own Eye, before ever we offer to pull out the Mote from our Brothers; we muſt be free from Sin,*

before

before it can be lawful for us to caſt the ſtone at the Adulterer.

Fatal to Vertue, Piety, and true Religion have theſe Corruptions always prov'd in the moſt *Sanctified* Profeſſors, and the *more holy* they have appear'd, the more deſtructive hath been their *Hypocriſy*. For I may with confidence affirm, that it hath never yet fail'd of being the bane and ruine of all publick Endeavours, which have hitherto prov'd ſucceſsleſs towards a true Reformation of Manners; and that the ſcandal ariſing from ſuch ill practices hath produc'd more avow'd Atheiſts, and profeſs'd champions in Vice, than all the open aſſaults and batteries of the moſt Wicked-Men againſt Religion and Vertue. And therefore, till it ſhall pleaſe God to correct this in all our Magiſtrates, the People will ſtill Sin on. The Magiſtrate may execute the Good Law given into his Charge, but his own *Example* in Sinning ſhall *encourage* more, than his *Puniſhment* can ever *deterr* from Vice. All manner of Zeal will be accounted as a feintſhow in Religion, and muſt be look'd upon as down-right *Hypocriſy* in him, who is not ſerious, ſincere, and firm himſelf in the Worſhip of the true God; and Atheiſm and Prophaneneſs muſt prevail under ſuch a Governour, who lays all the ſtreſs of his Religion only in Reforming others, himſelf being abominably Corrupt.

The conſequence of this cannot but be exceeding miſchievous; for Reformation of Manners doth indeed principally belong to the Magiſtrate, and to you Brethren, only as *Volunteers*, acting *Lawfully* under him; *His* is the *Commiſſion*, and *Yours*, the aſſiſtance of him in the Execution of his Office. But from hence the Good Example of your own Lives

becomes alike neceſſary to you both, and I have thought it my Duty to ſhew you both, (as far as I might preſume) what *your own* Qualifications ought to be in the firſt place, before ever you can propoſe to amend others.

May God in his Infinite Mercy, ſtrengthen the hands, and confirm the Souls of all them who are truly Good and Sincerely Conſcientious in this great Work! that ſome ſtop may be given to thoſe Vices and Blaſphemies, and to that General Corruption of Manners which have defil'd and overſpread our Land! and as for all thoſe, in whom this great truſt of Reformation is chiefly Lodg'd, the Magiſtrates and Senators, may God give them all Grace to forward this Work by reclaiming themſelves firſt of all, and by reforming all of their own Number who are Evil-Doers! by making them ſerious themſelves in that Holy Religion, of which they are Appointed the Defenders under our Prince! by making every one of them ſober, who forbid Intemperance! and Pious, who prohibit Swearing! and Chaſt, who puniſh Adultery!

So (and not otherwiſe) ſhall God proſper this good Work in the hands of the Magiſtrate and of the People. And do thou, O Lord, thus proſper our handy-work, for Jeſus Chriſt his ſake!

To whom with the Father and Holy Ghoſt, Three Perſons and one God, be aſcrib'd, as is moſt due, all Honour, and Power, and Glory! Amen.

FINIS.